



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

October 1-October 15, 2008

PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAMS



Newly installed lights increase security at the Garmsir Bazaar.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan

USAID Brings Light to Helmand Bazaar: Garmsir Bazaar, in Helmand province, has long suffered from looting and insecurity after dark. In summer, extreme temperatures prevent many shoppers from going out into the daytime heat. Yet at night, criminals frequently pillaged the bazaar, robbing vendors of their products and creating an atmosphere of fear.

At the request of Garmsir District Governor Abdullah Jan, USAID delivered and installed 36 solar lights in the bustling bazaar, providing an affordable energy resource and lighting the entire shopping area. The new lights not only enhance security, but increase economic development in Garmsir by allowing the bazaar to remain open past dark.

Garmsir's Governor is thrilled with the results. He says that there are now over 400 open shops along the bazaar, including bakeries, grocery shops and auto mechanics. "Residents can now get everything they need in Garmsir," he reported.

DEMOCRACY & GOVERNANCE

Uruzgun PRT Distributes Legal Awareness Materials: Working together to improve the rule of law in Afghanistan, this September USAID and the Dutch provincial reconstruction team (PRT) in Uruzgan province coordinated the delivery of 12,000 comic book sets with legal awareness messages to elementary schools throughout the province.

The books were designed and printed by the USAID-funded Afghanistan Rule of Law Project. They include six comics that address basic legal rights, constitutional, and women's rights in an easy to understand format. The books have received positive feedback from readers and from



The Dutch PRT coordinated the delivery of 12,000 ARoLP legal awareness comic books to elementary schools throughout Uruzgan province.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan



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organizations like the Dutch PRT, which have used the books as part of their own justice-sector development activities.

Voter Registration Process Makes Steady Progress: With the help of the USAID-supported UNDP/ELECT program, the number of Afghans registering to vote is rising steadily throughout the country.

Despite violent threats against them and their families, voter registration workers have gained confidence as efforts to protect them improve. USAID and international mentors are working hard to build and strengthen Afghan security forces, and, as a result, officials have become more effective at responding to threats, investigating incidents and communicating with the Independent Election Commission. The majority of registration centers are functioning normally, allowing Afghanistan's citizens to safely participate in the democratic process.

As of September 2008, approximately 553,512 eligible voters have registered. Thirty-five percent of these are women who were once excluded from the political process. Thanks to better safety and election support, USAID remains optimistic that many more Afghans will register to vote in the coming months.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

Afghanistan's Energy Sector Opens to Private Investment: The Government of Afghanistan is striving to rebuild its energy infrastructure. Without reliable energy sources, families do not feel safe and comfortable in their homes, businesses struggle to provide quality services, and the government cannot provide its citizens with basic public services.

In September 2008, President Karzai signed a decree establishing a power regulatory body in Afghanistan. This new body will promote private sector investment in Afghanistan's energy industry, giving commercial businesses the opportunity to develop and manage the country's energy services. The decree also opens up the energy sector to foreign-owned businesses, which the government hopes will invest in Afghanistan's energy infrastructure, share their expertise, and make the energy sector more efficient so that everyone in Afghanistan benefits.

USAID advisors helped draft the new decree by obtaining ministerial and Presidential support and by providing sound advice on how to lay the ground work for Afghanistan's brighter future.



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October 1-October 15, 2008

Islamic Investment and Finance Cooperative Opens in Kunar: On October 8th, officials held the Grand Opening Ceremony for an Islamic Investment and Finance Cooperative (IIFC) in the eastern province of Kunar. The event was attended by new members of the cooperative and local government officials.

Like many Afghans, the people of Kunar are in dire need of financial services to rebuild their livelihoods. The USAID-supported investment and finance cooperatives provide a range of Sharia-compliant products to their members. The loans empower families to improve their farms and businesses, purchase quality products, and build a better future.



Officials at the Grand Opening Ceremony for the Kunar Islamic Investment and Finance Cooperative (IIFC).

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan

The World Council of Credit Unions (WOCCU) has established six investment and financial cooperatives in eastern Afghanistan. As of September 2008, the cooperatives in this area have disbursed a cumulative amount of US\$1.6 million to support over 900 active borrowers. Current membership has increased to over 5,000 individuals, including 450 women.



The Takhar Women's Handicrafts Skills Association displaying their products.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan

USAID Supports Women Entrepreneurs in Takhar: This October, USAID's Small and Medium Enterprise Development Program supported an exhibition for the Takhar Women's Handicrafts Skills Association in the provincial capital, Taloqn city. The exhibition showcased women's handicrafts and provided them with an opportunity to gain new customers and spread the word about their products. Over 500 visitors attended the event, including members of foreign organizations who will help the women sell their products on the international market. The exhibition also provided Takhar's women, many of them war widows and aspiring entrepreneurs, with a chance to meet each other and discuss ways to

work together. This was the first USAID-supported event to promote and market Takhar's handicrafts, and the association believes it marks the beginning of strong growth for the province's women-owned businesses.



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ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT AND AGRICULTURE

Afghanistan's Pistachio Orchards Revived: Afghanistan's once thriving pistachio forests declined rapidly after decades of war and neglect. Once a source of pride to the people of Samangan province, today farmers are working hard to restore this valuable economic and environmental asset.

On October 16th, USAID-supported Pistachio Forest Management Committees (FMCs) reported on the success of these efforts. The committees described how they had achieved improved harvests and stronger conservation in the orchards. Pistachio farmers have learned better management practices from USAID-supported activities and as a result, have better soil, many new trees, and significantly higher profits on their pistachio harvests. In addition to higher incomes, reforestation efforts created new jobs and strengthened Samangan's communities as they work together to protect their valuable pistachio resources.